

Schools of Buddhist Thought in India - A Critical Examination of their Origin

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The Unity of the Scope and Content of the Message of Buddhism

This invariably is the historical reality of Buddhism. Buddhism had **a novel and distinct message of salvation for mankind**. It was declared to be positively **not theo-centric**. Instead, it was **anthropocentric** - *attāno loko* - with no absolute refuge to be sought outside. And no Divine Controller or Regulator - *anabhissaro*.

The reception of the world at large to this message, the Buddha was quite aware, was not going to be very warm-hearted. It was going to be beyond the ken of the average worldling. It is contrary to their expectations - *ālaya-ramāya ālaya-ratāya ālaya-sammuditāya pajāya duddasaṃ idam thānaṃ ...* M. I.167; S.I.136; Vin. I.4f. Compare also A.II. 131 where *anālaya* is used in the opposite sense of *ālaya* and with no other implications. [Note that *ālaya* here has nothing to do with *ālayaviññāna* of the Mahāyāna **as mistakenly assumed by Rahula** - The Middle Way, August 1964]

This position which Buddhism expounds is not easily seen by the world which is prone to clinging [*taṇhāsamyojanā*], being wrapped up in ignorance [*avijjānivaraṇā*]. And he categorically said *rāga-rattā na dakkhinti tamokkhandhena āvaṭṭā*. Even an endeavour to tackle it was an uphill task - *paṭisota-gāmī*, he declared. It is eminently suited for the wise - *nipunam*.

Therefore in the not too distant subsequent history of Buddhism in India, an essentially very big economic question, as it were, of **market-value** or of **supply and demand** was going to crop up very soon.

We are of the opinion, that for the most part, new interpretations of Buddhism, even the very emergence of the basic trends of the Mahayana

towards the beginnings of the Christian era [like its primary theocentricism in *ta riki* as in Japanese Buddhism much later], are a reaction and revolt against the primary anti-God thrust of early Buddhism. It is **the complete rejection and removal of the external helping hand of a saviour** that opened the doors again, even the back doors at that, to re-introduce into Buddhism the **concept of divine grace from outside, from outside the reality of the human realm.**

Besides this, we also believe, that the reduction in early Buddhism of **the whole of human existence to a mere phenomenon** of the **working of the khandhas**, as in the pungent remarks of Bhikkhuni Vajirā to Mara [*Evaṃ santesu khandhesu hoti satto ' ti sammutī*], would have left many, even among Buddhist thinkers of the day, dangling in the air, in their attempt **to establish and maintain a theory of samsāric or migratory psycho-ethical continuity** beyond death [as in the misconception of the samsāric *viññāṇa* theory of Bhikkhu Sāti who had to be corrected by the Buddha.

It is undoubtedly a desire to find within early Buddhist teachings handy and convenient slots into which they could slip in or find pegs on which they could hang **new substitutes to the old ideas** of self [*pudgala*] or soul [*ātman*] current in Indian thinking which led to the mushrooming of neo-philosophical schools of Buddhist thinking, following the early centuries of the post-parinibbāna period.

Without an adequate grasp of the historical reality of this situation, many students of Buddhist history appear to endeavour to seek explanations for the emergence of new [and we think, quite often unwarranted] lines of interpretation to old basic Buddhist concepts. Seeing them as deviationist, they appear unjustifiably far-flung.

In this attempt, quite many of them **try to read original Pali texts, in their own way, without an adequate grasp of the language, to support their own postulates.** We are sorry we have to point them out as gross howlers, committed deliberately or otherwise. We sample here below a few for your perusal. Here is a serious instance of such a distortion, in the hands of a very distinguished scholar of the

category of Professor N. Dutt. With a deep sense of humility we submit to you his presentation which, we suspect, he has arrived at through **his own mistranslation**.

** [Ananda replied " We are not without a refuge (*appaṭisaraṇā*), dhamma is our refuge. There is a treatise called *Pātimokkha* which has been formulated by the omniscient Teacher and which **all the monks living in the same parish (*gāmakkhetta*) have to recite** in a monastery where they assemble on the *uposatha* days. **Should there occur any difference or doubt in the recitation, the bhikkhus present explain them in accordance with the *dhamma*** (hence they have *dhamma* as their refuge)."] [Note: Translation errors are highlighted.]. *Majjhima*, III. pp.7ff. **N. Dutt, Buddhist Sects in India, 1970, p.43 and p.40 in 1998 edition.**

*** This is a **disastrous misunderstanding** of the Pali text quoted, specially in the hands of a reputed scholar. The **resulting errors of interpretation** are extremely misleading.

- i. "All monks residing in the same monastery do not recite the *Pātimokkha* on the *uposatha* day. It is not all monks who recite. It is the Reciter [or *Pātimokkhuddesaka*] who recites. Others only listen to him attentively and keep track of what is being recited [*Taṃ sādhukaṃ suṇoma manasi karoma*]."
- ii. There is no reference whatsoever to ' there being any difference or doubt in the recitation '. It is the discovery of any offense committed by a bhikkhu in terms of the *sikkhāpada* recited - *tasmiṃ ce bhaññamāne hoti bhikkhussa āpatii hoti bhikkhussa vītikkamo*.
- iii. Deriving from his **second wrong assumption above**, the writer makes the following most serious error. He says: " ... the bhikkhus present **explain them in accordance with the *dhamma*** (hence they have *dhamma* as their refuge)". This **error betrays a complete ignorance of what the function of the *Pātimokkha* recital was expected to be. *Yathādhamma* means according to **tradition as already laid down**. It is supported by the**

accompanying phrase *yathāsatham* = as instructed.

*** Yet another point put forward by Prof. Dutt, which we believe if properly examined, will receive a different emphasis.

Talking of the not-totally-unanimous endorsement which Thera Mahā Kassapa is said to have received regarding the holding of the First Council, Professor Dutt adds at *op. cit.* p.42 [p. 39 in 1998 edition] that ' Purāṇa expressed his inability to accept the same as the words of the Teacher. He further insisted on the incorporation into the Vinaya of eight rules relating to food [*Cullavagga* XI. 1.11]. The Mahīsāsaka Vinaya not only upheld these eight rules as pointed out by Prof. Przyluski and also gave special recognition to Purāṇa as one of the foremost teachers of the time '.

[p.42 in 1970 and p. 39 in 1998 editions f.n. 3. The eight rules (as translated by Zuzuki from Chinese) are:- i. cooking food indoors, ii. cooking indoors, iii. cooking of one's own accord, iv. taking food of one's own accord, v. receiving food when rising early in the morning, vi. carrying food home in compliance with the wish of the giver, vii. having miscellaneous fruits, viii. eating things grown in a pond.].

** We wish to add here, over and above all Professorial comments, **our own observations about Venerable Purāṇa incident.**

“As a dissentient from the activities of the First Buddhist Council, if Venerable Purāṇa is to be held in high esteem, let us take a close look at **the eight points on food** which he is supposed to have insisted on being included in the Vinaya, and on account of which the **Mahīsāsakas** regard him as a foremost teacher of the time.

“This incident of **the eight points on food** refers to a period not far removed from the passing away of the Buddha. That a **foremost teacher of the time** in the Sāsana, and that almost within the living memory of the Master, quarrelled over such frivolous and humiliating rules about food and manners of eating, is almost

unthinkable to us.

"A hundred years later, at the time of the Second Council, points regarding *siṅgiloṇakapa* or carrying salt in a horn and *jaloghikappa* or drinking unfermented brews are reasonably understandable. The fact that **Mahīsāsakas**, no matter at what later date in the history of the Sāsana, pay Venerable Purāṇa such glowing tribute, reveals the true Sāsana ideals which the **Mahīsāsakas** are supposed to be championing. [The **Mahīsāsaka Vinaya** in a Sanskrit version was brought to China from Sri Lanka by the Chinese traveller monk Fa Hsien and is said to have been translated into Chinese in A.D. 424. This Sanskrit text could not be of Mahavihara origin, possibly from the Abhayagiriya. Hence not of original Theravada alignment.]"

Let us also add here that our Cullavagga which is the **extant oldest record about the First Council**, and at **that of canonical antiquity**, records venerable Purāṇa's unwillingness to endorse the proceedings of the Council, although he concedes that the recital had been well done by the Theras. He is also said to insist on holding to **the version he himself is supposed to have had received from the Buddha**. But this position **of reference to the Buddha as a scriptural authority** is the very first one of the four *mahāpadesa* which the Buddha himself had anticipated and had ordered his disciples not to accept in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.

The Cullavagga also records nothing about the eight Vinaya points which the Mahīsāsakas claim as being raised by Purāṇa. So we feel that the evidence for the glorification of Purāṇa reduces itself to no more than mere hearsay, or wishful thinking, of a much later date, without any historical backing. They do betray, to a very great extent, **much warped partisan loyalties of a later generation**.